

# UZBEKISTAN 2022 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Uzbekistan is a constitutional republic with a political system led by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev and his allies. In the October 2021 presidential election, President Mirziyoyev won reelection with 80.2 percent of the total votes. A genuine choice of political alternatives was not available to voters because true opposition candidates were unable to register or run for office. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe stated, “while election day was peaceful, significant irregularities were observed and important safeguards were often disregarded during voting, counting, and tabulation.”

The government authorizes four different entities to investigate criminal activity and provide security. The Ministry of Internal Affairs controls police, who are responsible for law enforcement, maintenance of order, and the investigation of crimes. It also investigates and disciplines police officers if they are accused of human rights violations. The National Guard provides for public order and the security of diplomatic missions, radio and television broadcasting, and other state entities. The State Security Service, whose chairperson reports directly to the president, deals with national security and intelligence matters, including terrorism, corruption, organized crime, border control, and narcotics. Civilian authorities generally maintained effective control over the security forces, but security services also permeated civilian structures. Civilian authority interactions with security services’ personnel were opaque, making it difficult to define the scope and limits of civilian authority. There were reports that members of the security and law enforcement agencies, particularly police and prison officials, committed abuses.

On July 1, protests broke out in Nukus, capital of the autonomous region of Karakalpakstan, in response to draft constitutional changes that would have stripped Karakalpakstan of its autonomous status and removed its right to secede. President Mirziyoyev declared a state of emergency, and the government cut off the internet in the region and called up the National Guard to quell the protests, which ended by July 3. According to the government, 21 persons were killed (18

in the immediate aftermath, with three more dying in the hospital in the weeks after the protests), 243 were injured, and 516 were detained. Although hard evidence was scarce, human rights activists said the number of dead and injured was higher than the official numbers. Human Rights Watch reported “security forces unjustifiably used lethal force and other excessive responses to disperse mainly peaceful demonstrators.” Activists also reported that persons, including journalists, were detained and held incommunicado for weeks following the protests. The government established a commission to investigate the events led by Ombudsperson Feruza Eshmatova. The results of the investigation were pending at year’s end. A trial began on November 28 for 22 persons the government accused of participating in or inciting the violence.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: unlawful or arbitrary killings, including extrajudicial killings; torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by the government; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary arrest or detention; political prisoners; transnational repression against individuals in another country; serious problems with the independence of the judiciary; arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media, including censorship and the existence of criminal libel and slander laws; serious restrictions on internet freedom; substantial interference with freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association, including restrictions on civil society organizations, human rights activists, and others who criticized the government; restrictions on freedom of movement; refoulement of refugees to a country where they would face torture or persecution; inability of citizens to change their government peacefully through free and fair elections; serious and unreasonable restrictions on political participation; corruption; lack of investigation of and accountability for gender-based violence; substantial barriers to accessing sexual and reproductive health services; existence and use of laws criminalizing consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults; and significant restrictions on workers’ freedom of association.

Impunity of government officials remained pervasive despite some efforts by law enforcement agencies to investigate officials for human rights abuses and corruption.

## **Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person**

### **a. Arbitrary Deprivation of Life and Other Unlawful or Politically Motivated Killings**

There were allegations that could not be verified that the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings.

In November 2021 the Denau District Criminal Court convicted two police officers of causing intentional grievous bodily harm and for exceeding authority in the death in custody of Hasan Hushmatov. The officers received eight years and six months in prison.

Authorities investigated and arrested three officials for the death of Aziz Akhmedov, who died in June 2021 after Road Patrol Service officers assaulted him. Two police officers, M. Kuchkarov and S. Rakhimberidev, received two years in prison in December 2021. In June N. Ismoilov, an inspector in the Department of Internal Affairs, was charged with “causing death by negligence” and “exceeding authority.” The case was in district court at year’s end.

### **b. Disappearance**

There were no reports of disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities.

### **c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and Other Related Abuses**

The law prohibits such practices, but there were credible reports that government officials employed them. The law bans the use of evidence obtained by torture in court proceedings. An antitorture law includes liability for the use of torture and other inhumane or degrading treatment. In 2020 the UN Committee Against Torture concluded “that torture and ill-treatment continue to be routinely committed by, at the instigation of and with the consent of the State party’s law enforcement, investigative and prison officials, principally for the purpose of extracting confessions or information to be used in criminal proceedings.” These conclusions remained valid despite government reform efforts. Defendants raised

torture allegations during several criminal trials. Several trials of persons charged with committing torture were closed to the public. Court decisions in those cases were not publicly available. Following their release, political prisoners reported to Human Rights Watch (HRW) and others they were beaten and tortured, including being held in stress positions, while in prison.

According to human rights activists, although the practice of coordinated, top-down orders to torture specific detainees had ceased, many law enforcement officers' methods and attitudes remained unchanged. Most abuse reportedly occurred during interrogations, where police used physical abuse such as beatings and psychological coercion to gain confessions. Under the country's legal system, psychological pressure and threats are not considered abuse or mistreatment.

The independent human rights nongovernmental organization (NGO) Ezgulik reported that on June 25 inmate Alisher Yakubov, sentenced to 10 years in prison for rape in 2020, tried to commit suicide by jumping out of a multistory building in Tavaksai penal colony number 7. Yakubov's family claimed Alisher was regularly tortured in the colony. Ezgulik had a copy of Alisher's suicide note, in which he described the torture, abuse, and harassment he suffered in the colony. The Tashkent Special Prosecutor's Office conducted an initial investigation, which resulted in a decision not to institute criminal proceedings due to a lack of evidence of a crime.

Local media reported that Madiyar Orazbaev, arrested by Karakalpakstan security forces on July 3, died because of injuries he received while tortured in custody. Orazbaev reportedly was beaten during his interrogation and died in a hospital two days after his arrest. On July 5, the Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Karakalpakstan initiated a criminal case against unspecified officers of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Karakalpakstan for "use of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment." The preliminary investigation of the criminal case was underway at year's end.

Ellona Firsova and Aleksandr Solenko reported being beaten by police officers on June 7 in Tashkent. According to Firsova, police officers beat them, forced them into a car, seized their cell phones, did not allow them to call their families, and kept them at the police station. Early in the morning Firsova and Salenko were

taken by ambulance to a hospital, where they were diagnosed with concussions, broken bones, and bruises. An investigation by Mirzoulugbek District Prosecutor's Office of Tashkent City did not find evidence of torture and closed the criminal case in August.

## **Prison and Detention Center Conditions**

Prison conditions were in some circumstances harsh and life threatening due to gross overcrowding, food shortages, physical abuse, and inadequate sanitary conditions and medical care.

**Abusive Physical Conditions:** Although according to government reports the overall prison occupancy rates were approximately 64 percent, activists have reported overcrowding in some prisons. For example, Ezgulik reports that the detention center in Tashkent, with space for 1,900 prisoners, currently has 3,000 prisoners. Access to potable water, food of good quality, and showers or other sanitary facilities were poor. Inmates often relied upon visiting family members to provide necessary provisions. Heating, cooling, and lighting were inadequate in older facilities. The availability of medical care was limited in some detention facilities.

According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, prisoners are entitled to outdoor exercise during nonworking hours. Prison rules also state that inmates should undergo a medical examination upon request and at intervals of not more than six months. No information on implementation of these rules was publicly available.

There were 75 cases of deaths in detention facilities during the year. Investigations showed the causes of death were due to natural, nonviolent factors. No charges were brought against prison staff members for any inmate deaths. In October media reported a Fergana-area teenager died of injuries sustained in a beating at a youth detention facility, where he was being held for suspected shoplifting. The Office of the Ombudsman reported an unspecified number of teenagers in the detention facility confessed to the beating that led to the teenager's death. As a result of the investigation, two employees of the facility were arrested for negligence resulting in death, the head of detention center was fired, and seven employees were disciplined.

**Administration:** The Office of the Ombudsman and the Prosecutor General's Office may investigate complaints from detainees and the public. The Ombudsman's Office may make recommendations on behalf of specific prisoners, including changes to the sentences of nonviolent offenders to make them more appropriate to the offense. Some family members of detained or released prisoners stated the Office of the Ombudsman did not respond to their complaints. Some human rights activists reported that lawyers had no problems meeting with their clients, although others disputed this, saying access was both limited and monitored. Prison officials typically allowed family members to visit prisoners for up to four hours two to four times per year. Officials also permitted longer one-to-three-day visits two to four times per year, depending on the type of prison facility, as well as overnight stays.

The government stated that prisoners have the right to practice any religion, but some prisoners complained to family members that prison authorities did not permit them to observe religious rituals that conflicted with the prison's schedule. Such rituals included traditional Islamic morning prayers. While some activists reported this situation had improved, others stated the restrictions continued. Although some prison libraries had copies of the Quran and the Bible, family members continued to complain that authorities did not allow all religious prisoners access to religious materials.

According to former political prisoners, the government provides released prisoners with an allowance upon parole to help them reintegrate into society, although some reported not receiving all promised benefits. Such allowances include travel expenses to one's place of residence, health benefits, and the issuance of an internal passport, which is the primary form of identification in the country. Upon release, convicts sign a document acknowledging they understand the terms of their parole. This document typically includes a prohibition on travel abroad for up to one year. In prior years several former prisoners reported that authorities levied a monetary fine against them as a condition of their parole. Failure to abide by the terms of payment may result in the termination of parole. For example, one former prisoner reported 20 percent of his monthly salary was garnished by the government for 18 months following his release.

High-level government officials periodically visited different regions of the

country to conduct outreach to prisoners, and the government stated it maintained this policy. The government allowed prison access to representatives of some local NGOs and international organizations, but not the ICRC (see section 1.c.). COVID-19-related movement restrictions and strict quarantine protocols issued throughout the country also affected the ability of officials to conduct such visits.

**Independent Monitoring:** UNICEF regularly visited the country's four juvenile offenders' colonies. The International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) had not visited detainees since 2013 because the ICRC was barred from entering the country. Some independent observers had limited access to some parts of the penitentiary system, including pretrial detention facilities, women's prisons, and prison settlements. Ezgulik reported the Ombudsman's Office had refused to allow the NGO to participate in prison monitoring visits since July, even though the legislature had mandated Ezgulik be a part of the country's prison monitoring group.

#### **d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention**

The constitution and law prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention and provide for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of his or her arrest or detention in court. The government did not always observe these requirements.

##### **Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees**

By law a judge must review any decision to arrest accused individuals or suspects. Judges granted arrest warrants in most cases. Detention without formal charges is limited to 48 hours, although a prosecutor may request that a judge extend detention an additional 48 hours, after which the person must be charged or released. Judges typically granted such requests, and the judge who issued such an extension was often the same one who presided over the trial, which created incentives to cover up violations. The arresting authority is required to notify a relative of a detainee of the detention and to question the detainee within 24 hours of arrest.

Once authorities file charges, suspects may be held in pretrial detention for up to three months while investigations proceed. The law permits an extension of the investigation period for as much as seven months at the discretion of the

appropriate court upon a motion by the relevant prosecutor, who may also release a prisoner on bond pending trial. Those arrested and charged with a crime may be released without bail until trial on the condition they provide assurance of “proper behavior” and that they appear at trial. According to human rights advocates, authorities typically held suspects longer than the allowable period of detention. The judge conducting the arrest hearing is allowed to sit on the panel of judges during the individual’s trial.

The law allows detainees to request hearings before a judge to determine whether they should remain incarcerated or released before trial. While such requests for hearings were granted, judges typically granted detention requests from prosecutors.

The law authorizes the use of house arrest as a form of pretrial detention. By law an investigator, magistrate, or judge may order release of a detainee on bail. The minimum amount set for bail is 5.4 million soum (\$500), and there is no set maximum bail amount.

Defendants have the right to legal counsel from the time of arrest. State-appointed attorneys are available for those who do not hire private counsel. The country had relatively few defense lawyers, and activists stated this likely was due to lower levels of pay, prestige, and influence in comparison to judges and prosecutors. Officials did not always respect the right to counsel and occasionally forced defendants to sign written statements declining the right. Authorities’ selective intimidation and disbarment of defense lawyers produced a chilling effect that also compromised detainees’ access to legal counsel.

Some defense lawyers noted difficulty in accessing clients, the lack of private meeting spaces at law enforcement facilities to meet with detainees, and the lack of access to information regarding their clients’ cases.

The law requires authorities at pretrial detention facilities to arrange a meeting between a detainee and a representative from the Human Rights Ombudsman’s Office upon the detainee’s request. Officials allowed detainees in prison facilities to submit confidential complaints to the Ombudsman’s Office and the Prosecutor General’s Office.



The law provides for the National Guard, the Prosecutor General's Office, and police to electronically surveil attorneys' communications with clients. With the consent of the prosecutor or an investigator, officials (including prosecutors, investigators, and other law enforcement agencies) may have access to conversations, messages, and other forms of information conveyed between a defendant and his or her lawyer by telephone and other telecommunications devices. Officials may also record these conversations. In some cases, authorities detained suspects and required them to sign nondisclosure agreements that prevented them from discussing their cases publicly. Human rights lawyers complained that authorities used this tactic to prevent lawyers and clients from receiving outside assistance or boosting publicity regarding their cases.

On July 1, media advocacy groups reported journalist Lolagul Kallykhanova was detained in Tashkent and held incommunicado for several days. Kallykhanova, a native of Karakalpakstan, had been covering the protests in Nukus. On July 8, the prosecutor general announced Kallykhanova was being charged with "encroaching on public safety." In the same statement and in response to public critique of the handling of the case, the Prosecutor General's Office assured the public Kallykhanova's rights were being respected and that neither she nor others arrested in connection with the protests had any complaints. Kallykhanova remained in detention at year's end. Kallykhanova's trial began, along with that of 21 other alleged protestors, on November 28. The trial continued at year's end.

**Arbitrary Arrest:** Pro-lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) blogger Miraziz Bazarov, charged in 2021 by the Mirabad District Court with defamation for comments made in response to Islamic bloggers, was convicted in January of "slander out of mercenary or other vile motives" and sentenced to three years' restriction of liberty. In March the Tashkent City Court denied his appeal.

**Pretrial Detention:** Pretrial detention was a problem. Authorities did not provide access to a court for detainees to challenge the length or validity of pretrial detention, despite the law granting detainees the right to do so. Even when authorities did not file charges, police and prosecutors frequently sought to evade restrictions on the length of time that persons could be held without charges. No data were available on the approximate percentage of the prison and detainee

population in pretrial detention, the average length of time held, or whether the length of pretrial detention frequently equaled or exceeded the maximum sentence if convicted of offenses charged.

#### **e. Denial of Fair Public Trial**

While the constitution provides for an independent judiciary, the government generally did not respect judicial independence and impartiality. The Prosecutor General's Office and other law enforcement bodies occasionally exerted inappropriate pressure on members of the judiciary to render desired verdicts. Judges are appointed by the Supreme Judicial Council, subject to concurrence by the Senate. By law the Supreme Judicial Council may dismiss judges arbitrarily, regardless of the length of their terms, making them vulnerable to political pressure.

#### **Trial Procedures**

The law provides for the right to a fair and public trial, but the judiciary generally did not enforce this right. According to credible reports, state-appointed defense attorneys routinely acted in the interest of the government rather than of their clients because of their reliance on the state for a livelihood and fear of possible recrimination.

#### **Political Prisoners and Detainees**

There were reports of political prisoners or detainees.

According to Ezgulik, the only remaining political prisoner whose detention was not based on religious reasons was antigovernment blogger Otabek Sattoriy, who was convicted of extortion and slander and sentenced to 6.5 years in prison in 2021 (see also section 2.a.). The Ministry of the Interior reported more than 1,800 prisoners, approximately 6 percent of the country's prison population, were held for crimes related to their alleged religious extremism.

In years past, the government targeted peaceful political dissidents and convicted them of engaging in terrorist and extremist activities or for belonging to what the government called religious fundamentalist organizations. There were no reports

of such detentions during the year. NGO representatives stated they could not independently verify the numbers of such individuals who remained in detention.

Authorities sometimes did not provide political prisoners and detainees the same protections as other detainees, including by holding some incommunicado for prolonged periods of time, limiting their access to lawyers of their choosing, and psychologically intimidating some of them. The government sometimes did not permit access to such persons by human rights or humanitarian organizations.

**Amnesty:** For the first eight months of the year, the government pardoned 203 prisoners, including 75 prisoners convicted of religious extremism or on other religious charges.

### **Transnational Repression**

On September 20, *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL)*'s Kazakh Service reported that Karakalpak activists Koshkarbai Toremuratov, Jangeldi Jaksymbetov, and Raisa Kudaibergenova were placed in pretrial detention in Kazakhstan. On October 4, the Almaty-based digital news outlet *Vlast.kz* reported a fourth Karakalpak activist, Ziuar Mirmanbetova, was detained. Karakalpak activists in Kazakhstan alleged Uzbekistani law enforcement officers participated in the arrests. The activists were accused of encroaching on the constitutional order of Uzbekistan and producing, distributing, and demonstrating materials containing a threat to public security and public order. On October 15, HRW called for Kazakhstan not to deport the four detainees, claiming that Uzbek authorities were targeting diaspora Karakalpak activists in the aftermath of the July protests.

**Extraterritorial Killing, Kidnapping, Forced Returns, or Other Violence or Threats of Violence:** The country is credibly alleged to have used violence or threats of violence against individuals in other countries, including to force their return to the country, for purposes of politically motivated reprisal.

On January 12, Turkish authorities deported Jumasapar Dadebayev, a member of the Karakalpakstan separatist movement. According to his lawyer, he was forcibly deported to Uzbekistan by Turkish security services despite being granted refugee status in Turkey. His family learned of his whereabouts 11 days later, when an officer of the Karakalpak Ministry of Internal Affairs notified his father that he was

in a Tashkent detention center. Dadebayev was charged with genocide, terrorism, organization of riots, and several counts of slander, including slander against the president. On August 8, the court sentenced Dadebayev to 12.5 years in prison. Dadebayev appealed his charges, and hearings began on September 27.

### **Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies**

Citizens may file suit in civil courts for alleged human rights violations by officials, excluding investigators, prosecutors, and judges. Civil society reported in the past that bribes accepted by judges influenced their decisions in these cases.

### **Property Seizure and Restitution**

Government urban renewal campaigns to demolish older, Soviet-era apartment blocks and private homes in Tashkent and other regions continued to displace citizens from their homes or businesses, often without due process or adequate restitution.

According to the United Nations, the forced evictions contributed to already existing inequality, discrimination, segregation, social conflicts, and tensions, and they widened the poverty gap among the most socially and economically vulnerable and marginalized groups, especially women, children, minorities, and persons with disabilities.

Courts upheld the decision to evict Olga Abdullayeva and her family. A development corporation sought permission to build a high-rise on her land in Tashkent, and a Mirabad civil court ordered her eviction in 2021, along with her daughter and three grandchildren, including an infant of four months. Previously, in 2020, officials attempted to evict Abdullayeva by force, damaging her house. The most recent court decision ordered Abdullayeva and her family to be moved far from the center of the city to a smaller house, for little compensation. Abdullayeva continued to appeal her case.

According to human rights activist Elena Urlaeva, on January 22, in Samarkand 44 farmers who complained of land seizures were arrested by the order of the district *khokim* (khokims are local district, regional, and city administration leaders). Fifteen female farmers were released, and 29 male farmers were sentenced to 15

days in prison, despite President Mirziyoyev's public defense of farmers' rights.

According to the government, authorities misappropriated more than 41,900 acres of land during the year. Prosecutors protested 193 decisions of district and city administrators to allocate land. Administrative courts overturned more than 2,500 decisions. The General Prosecutor's Office brought related criminal and administrative charges against 134 officials.

#### **f. Arbitrary or Unlawful Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence**

Although the constitution and law forbid arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy, family, home, or correspondence, authorities did not respect these prohibitions. The law requires that prosecutors approve requests for search warrants for electronic surveillance, but there is no provision for judicial review of such warrants.

The government continued to use an estimated 12,000 *mahalla* (neighborhood) committees as a source of information on potential "extremists." The committees provide various social support functions, including the distribution of social welfare assistance to the elderly, single parents, or families with many children; intervention in cases of domestic violence; and adjudication of disputes among residents, but they also inform government and law enforcement authorities on community members. On March 1, the president issued a decree that reorganized the mahalla system to give it greater powers of oversight and surveillance in the local community. Mahallas in rural areas tended to be more influential than those in cities.

### **Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties**

#### **a. Freedom of Expression, Including for Members of the Press and Other Media**

The constitution and law provide for freedom of expression, including for members of the press and other media, but the government did not respect these rights.

**Freedom of Expression:** The law restricts criticism of the president, and publicly insulting the president is a crime punishable by up to five years' imprisonment. The law specifically prohibits publication of articles that incite religious conflict and ethnic discord or that advocate subverting or overthrowing the constitutional order. The government officially and unofficially restricted the ability of individuals to criticize the government or discuss matters of public interest, and it made frequent use of laws criminalizing libel and slander as "hate speech."

On April 5, the Supreme Court rejected blogger Otabek Sattoriy's appeal of his 6.5-year sentence for extortion and slander. Sattoriy was arrested and convicted in 2021 after taking videos of merchants and reporting on price gouging in local bazaars. The Committee to Project Journalists and HRW expressed concern regarding the government's handling of the case.

In January the Almazar District Court of Tashkent sentenced Fozilhoja Arifhojayev, a religious blogger who regularly criticized the country's clerical authorities, to a 7.5-year prison term for possessing "materials threatening public safety and public order" on his mobile phone.

On November 16, at the complaint of the deputy mayor of Tashkent, Sevinch Sadullayeva was arrested, jailed five days, fined 225,000 soum (\$20), and forced to undergo psychological counseling for videos and photographs she posted to her social media account. Most of the posts were photographs with her and her boyfriend. According to media she frequently wore "revealing" clothing and swimsuits in her posts.

On November 20, the Yunusabad District Criminal Court of Tashkent fined civil activist and independent journalist Aleksei Garshin 108 million soum (\$10,000) for "insulting" a woman in a Telegram group chat. Garshin was known for regularly posting YouTube videos fiercely critical of President Mirziyoyev, including a series of investigative videos revealing a secret resort allegedly built for the president in the mountains outside of Tashkent on a nature reserve. Garshin reported that after livestreaming a solitary demonstration of support for Ukraine outside the Ukrainian embassy in March, he experienced increased pressure from authorities and believed his fine to be retaliation for his activities.

Independent media did not operate freely because the state exercises control over media coverage. All media entities, foreign and domestic, must register with authorities and provide the names of their founders, chief editors, and staff members. Print media must also provide hard copies of publications to the government. The law holds all foreign and domestic media organizations accountable for the accuracy of their reporting, prohibits foreign journalists from working in the country without official accreditation, and requires foreign media outlets to conform to domestic media laws. The government used accreditation rules to deny some foreign journalists and media outlets the opportunity to work in the country. For example, authorities continued to deny *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's* accreditation request, but they accredited three *RFE/RL* journalists to cover the October Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit in Samarkand. Other broadcasters, such as the *BBC*, the *Voice of America*, and *Eurasianet*, were accredited.

The government prohibited the promotion of religious extremism, separatism, and fundamentalism as well as the instigation of ethnic and religious hatred. The law holds bloggers accountable for the accuracy of their posts and prohibits content deemed defaming to an individual's "honor and dignity." A few purportedly independent websites consistently reported the government's viewpoint.

**Violence and Harassment:** Police and security services subjected print and broadcast journalists to arrest, harassment, and intimidation.

On April 15, *Rost24* journalist Anora Sodikova reported she received government pressure and threats for an article linking 25 Uzbeks in the security services to the Pandora Papers, including Jahongir Usmanov, son of a late high-level official. Sadiqova removed the story from *Rost24* but kept it on her Facebook page. She also released a video that she believed led to the threats.

According to a now-deleted report by the digital news outlet *Zamon.com*, on June 11, law enforcement officers detained two journalists from independent broadcaster *Sevimli TV* and beat them after they attempted to enter a soccer stadium in Tashkent. The report said the officers denied the journalists entry to the stadium, and when they started to film from outside, the officers confiscated their press passes, and a group of six or seven police officers began beating them and

shocking them with tasers. One of the journalists needed medical treatment. The Committee to Protect Journalists called for authorities to investigate the case and ensure that any law enforcement officers who obstructed or attacked the press were held to account thoroughly and transparently.

On June 13, in the Yangi Bozor shopping center in Andijan, an employee of the Andijan city Department of Internal Affairs obstructed the work of and forcibly seized the cell phone of a Human.uz employee who was filming the sale of sugar.

**Censorship or Content Restrictions for Members of the Press and Other Media, including Online Media:** Journalists and senior editorial staff in state media organizations reported that some officials' responsibilities included censorship. In many cases the government placed individuals as editors in chief to serve as the main censor for a particular media outlet. Continuing the past trend of moderate criticism of the government, online publications such as *Kommersant.uz* and *Nuz.uz* published critical stories on matters such as demolitions, ecological problems, electricity outages, currency, trade, and the black market. The literary journal *Adobiyat Gazetesi* also published stories by authors who were on a "blacklist," which resulted in scrutiny that limited its ability to publish.

There was often little distinction between the editorial content of government and privately owned newspapers. Journalists engaged in limited investigative reporting. Widely read tabloids occasionally published articles that presented mild criticism of government policies or discussed problems that the government considered sensitive, such as trafficking in persons.

On March 6, *Radio Ozodlik* (the Uzbek service of *RFE/RL*) reported that some bloggers and journalists who tried to cover the January unrest in Kazakhstan said they were summoned by security forces and asked to write less on this topic, not to distribute videos, and not to call for rallies.

According to Reporters Without Borders, authorities intimidated journalists and bloggers into toning down their coverage of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and some articles on the subject on the popular digital news sites *Kun.uz* and *Daryo.uz* were later deleted. *Kun.uz* editor Umid Shermukhammedov claimed in a since-deleted Facebook post that he and two of the site's founders were summoned for



questioning by the State Security Service on February 26. The editor was reportedly ordered to cover the subject in a more “neutral” way. On April 19, Reporters Without Borders called on the government to allow journalists to freely report on the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Media outlets significantly increased their coverage of events in Ukraine in the second half of the year.

In June and July *Gazeta.uz* removed four articles criticizing the government's proposed constitutional reforms, including a June 22 article on a proposal that would allow the president to run for unlimited terms, a June 28 article on a proposal to strip the autonomous Republic of Karakalpakstan of its political status as an autonomous republic, and two July articles covering the unrest in Nukus. The articles disappeared from the website shortly after publication, reportedly in response to threats against the outlet.

**Libel/Slander Laws:** The criminal and administrative codes impose substantial monetary fines for defamation, including libel and slander. The government used charges of libel, slander, and defamation to punish journalists, human rights activists, and others who criticized the president or the government. Nevertheless, some bloggers and activists openly criticized the government on social media without legal reprisal.

A 2021 law established criminal liability for publicly insulting or defaming the president using social networks, the internet, or both. Conviction of an offense is punishable by three years’ correctional labor, restriction of movement for two to five years, or up to five years’ imprisonment.

On February 3, a district criminal court in Khorezm sentenced blogger Sobirjon Babaniyazov to three years in prison for posting videos and audio messages on social media that insulted the president. Babaniyazov apologized in court and claimed he was drunk when he made the videos. The government’s forensic linguistic examination found the footage constituted a public insult of the president.

There remain no updates to the 2021 case of Valijon Kalanov, who was forcibly admitted to a psychiatric clinic after his detention by the State Security Services for insulting the president on social media. According to a statement by the Jizzakh

Region Prosecutor's Office, Kalanov posted a video misinterpreting the president's reforms on his Facebook and YouTube pages that "insulted and slandered the president and disseminated information that had a negative impact on the president's reputation."

## **Internet Freedom**

According to the Ministry of Justice, the government has the authority to block websites or blogs without a court order. The government implemented procedures for restricting access to websites that include "banned information." Based on these regulations, a website or blog could be blocked for calling for the violent overthrow of the constitutional order and territorial integrity of the country; spreading ideas of war, violence, terrorism, religious extremism, separatism, and fundamentalism; disclosing information that is a state secret or protected by law; or disseminating information that could lead to national, ethnic, or religious enmity, information that involves pornography, or promotes drug use. Conviction of insulting or slandering the president online or in the press is punishable by up to five years' imprisonment.

The government generally allowed access to the internet, including news and social media sites, although select "sensitive" websites remain blocked. All websites in the .uz domain were required to register with authorities and provide the names of their founders, chief editors, and staff members. The government continued to block human rights news websites such as *Forum 18* and *Ozodlik*. Several active online forums allowed registered users to post comments and read discussions on a range of social problems. To become a registered user in these forums, individuals must provide personally identifiable information. It was not clear whether the government attempted to collect this information, although provisions of the law require internet cafe proprietors to log customers' browser history.

In 2021 the Law on Personal Data, which requires companies to store the personal data of citizens on servers in the country, came into effect. Additionally, these servers must be registered with the State Inspectorate for Control of Informatization and Telecommunications (Uzkomnazorat).

In 2021 the government blocked several websites, including Twitter, TikTok, and VKontakte. After Uzkomnazorat blocked Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, and other websites for three hours later in the year, the president fired the inspectorate's head, calling these blockages "erroneous and uncoordinated." On March 25, the government unblocked Skype, blocked since 2015, and on August 1, it unblocked Twitter, WeChat, and VKontakte.

On April 26, the president signed a decree, "On additional measures for the further development of the field of intellectual property," which creates a register of websites that violate copyright and related intellectual property rights.

### **Restrictions on Academic Freedom and Cultural Events**

The government continued to limit academic freedom and cultural events. Authorities occasionally required department-head approval for university lectures, and university professors generally practiced self-censorship.

### **b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association**

The government restricted freedoms of peaceful assembly and association.

#### **Freedom of Peaceful Assembly**

The constitution and law provide for freedom of assembly. While the government restricted this right, it sometimes allowed individuals to exercise this freedom without reprisal.

The law requires demonstrators to obtain permits, but most demonstrators proceeded without filing permit applications. In some incidents authorities subjected citizens to substantial monetary fines, threats, arbitrary detention, or abuse for violating procedures for organizing meetings, rallies, and demonstrations or for facilitating unsanctioned events by providing space or materials. Organizers of "mass events" with the potential for more than 100 participants must sign agreements with the Ministry of Internal Affairs for the provision of security prior to advertising or holding such an event.

According to the press service of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Karakalpakstan, on February 2, a large crowd blocked the highway around the

Nukus Dekhkan market. Local authorities arrested three demonstrators for unauthorized demonstration. They were sentenced to 15 days in jail by the Nukus City Court.

*RFE/RL* reported that on February 24, an administrative court in Tashkent fined oppositionist Vazira Egamberdiyeva 1 million 350 thousand soum (\$125) for having approximately 10 activists at her house to discuss the latest developments in Kazakhstan and the socioeconomic situation in Uzbekistan. She was found guilty of “creating conditions for holding unauthorized meetings, rallies, street marches and demonstrations.” On March 13, Tashkent City Court rejected Egamberdieva’s appeal.

On July 1, mass protests regarding expected changes to the constitution turned violent in Nukus, Karakalpakstan. The government deployed the national guard to quell the protests, and the president publicly claimed protesters had tried to take control of government buildings and seized government-owned weapons. The government reported 21 dead, 243 wounded, and 516 arrested. Several human rights groups raised concerns over the holding incommunicado of many arrestees, including journalists who were covering the events. The government assembled a commission to investigate the events in Nukus, headed by Ombudsperson Feruza Eshmatova and composed of members of the Oliy Majlis (Parliament), academics, and civil society organizations. The results of the investigation had not been released by year’s end.

## **Freedom of Association**

While the law provides for freedom of association, the government continued to restrict this right. Authorities sought to control NGO activity, internationally funded NGOs, and unregulated Islamic and minority religious groups. The operating environment for independent civil society, in particular human rights defenders, remained restrictive, although several activists reported improved cooperation with government officials. Several independent NGOs continued to face barriers to registering locally due to earlier court orders against them or other objections by officials.

The Ministry of Justice, which oversees the registration of NGOs, requires NGOs

to obtain the ministry's approval to hold large meetings with nonmembers, including foreigners; to seek the ministry's clearance on any event where materials are to be distributed; and to notify the ministry in writing of the content and scope of the events in question.

There are legal restrictions on the types of groups that may be formed. The law requires that organizations with an operating budget and funds register formally with the government. The law allows for a six-month grace period for organizations to operate while awaiting registration from the Ministry of Justice, during which time the government officially classifies them as "initiative groups." Several NGOs continued to function as initiative groups for periods longer than six months.

The Ministry of Justice does not require NGOs to obtain approval to conduct events, but they must notify the ministry of plans to conduct public programs. The minimum period for informing the ministry of planned activities is 10 days before the start of an event without the participation of foreign citizens, and 20 days before the start of event with the participation of foreign citizens. The ministry provides NGOs with written notice only in cases of refusal to conduct the event. The law also requires that NGOs file annual reports to the government.

The law grants the Ministry of Justice authority to inspect and audit NGOs. The administrative liability code imposes substantial monetary fines for violations of procedures governing NGO activity as well as for "involving others" in "illegal NGOs." The law does not specify whether the term refers to NGOs suspended or closed by the government or merely NGOs not officially registered. The administrative code also imposes penalties against international NGOs for engaging in political activities, activities inconsistent with their charters, or activities the government did not approve in advance.

Due to the burdensome challenges of registering NGOs, many prominent and respected organizations could not obtain registration from the government. As a result, several civil society organizations could not establish themselves.

On June 13, the government instituted new regulations strengthening state control on civil society by governing the operation of local NGOs implementing

international grants. Per the new regulations, local NGOs must submit to the Ministry of Justice a notification of receipt of foreign funds for implementing international grant projects. The Ministry of Justice then notifies the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which then approves or denies the project. After Foreign Ministry approval, the Ministry of Justice assigns a government “partner” to oversee implementation of the project. The NGO and its governmental partner must create a “roadmap” describing how the project will be implemented. These new regulations created a further chilling effect on the operation of civil society, resulting in long timelines between approval of internationally funded grant projects.

### **c. Freedom of Religion**

See the Department of State’s *International Religious Freedom Report* at [www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/](http://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/).

### **d. Freedom of Movement and the Right to Leave the Country**

The constitution and laws provide for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these related rights.

**In-country Movement:** The government requires hotels to register foreign visitors with the government daily. The government requires foreigners staying in private homes to register their addresses within three days of arrival.

### **e. Protection of Refugees**

The government did not cooperate with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to refugees, returning refugees, or asylum seekers, as well as other persons of concern. The country is not a signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention and does not aid refugees within its borders. UNHCR is not accredited in the country and is unable to directly assist refugees.

Following the August 2021 fall of Kabul, thousands of Afghans sought refuge from the Taliban in the country. The government reported that as of year’s end,

there were 13,000 Afghan citizens residing in the country, while the United Nations estimated the number at 17,000. Most of these individuals were well established, having arrived before the Taliban takeover, but approximately 2,000 needed assistance. The government refrained from refouling these individuals back to Afghanistan but provided few services.

**Access to Asylum:** A presidential decree technically established a system of political asylum, but there were no reports of any individuals receiving political asylum in the country. International observers reported the political asylum system was “nonexistent.”

**Refoulement:** While there were no reports of the government refouling Afghan refugees, Afghans reported government officials often “encouraged” them to return to Afghanistan. The visa renewal process was expensive and rife with corruption; some individuals who applied for renewal received “exit visas,” which they interpreted as requiring them to depart the country.

**Freedom of Movement:** Immediately following the fall of Kabul, individuals fleeing Afghanistan without visas for the country were restricted to a secure camp in Termez near the border with Afghanistan. Most of these individuals “voluntarily” returned to Afghanistan, according to government reports. Most other Afghans in the country entered with valid visas. There were no reports of restriction of their movement.

**Employment:** Afghan citizens who entered on tourist visas are legally barred from working. While some refugees were able to find informal employment, most depended on their savings and money transfers from friends and family members.

**Access to Basic Services:** Afghans in the country were typically able to receive care at government hospitals and clinics. Most refugees reported they were unable to enroll their children in local schools.

**Temporary Protection:** In the fall of 2021, the government provided temporary protection to 498 persons who entered from Afghanistan in former Afghan-government military aircraft. Refugees were held in a secure residential camp near Termez pending third-country processing and relocation. Approximately 2,000 other Afghan refugees who lived in the country did not receive humanitarian

protection from the government.

## **f. Status and Treatment of Internally Displaced Persons**

Not applicable.

## **g. Stateless Persons**

According to UNHCR, there were 38,000 stateless persons in the country. Most were former Soviet Union citizens who had not received Uzbek or other citizenship. In 2021 the country resolved 33,000 cases of statelessness through the law on citizenship, which gives Uzbekistan citizenship to any stateless individual granted permanent residence in Uzbekistan before January 1, 2005.

## **Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process**

The constitution and law provide citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage. The government did not conduct free and fair elections, restricted freedom of expression, and suppressed political opposition.

### **Elections and Political Participation**

**Recent Elections:** In 2021 presidential elections took place. All five registered political parties nominated candidates for the election. Incumbent President Mirziyoyev won reelection with 80.2 percent of the vote.

The five presidential candidates represented parties that were vetted by the country's ruling party. Following international criticism of weak interaction among candidates, the Central Election Commission (CEC) arranged a preelection debate at which none of the official candidates was present. The CEC did not allow other candidates who might have offered different views to register. For example, authorities prevented Khidirnazar Allakulov of the Truth and Progress Party and former pop singer Jahongir Otajonov from registering and rejected their claims to have received the required number of signatures for registration.

Domestic civil society organizations could not legally monitor elections. The



country's five political parties and international organizations were legally permitted to monitor the election.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights deployed an election observation mission of more than 200 monitors. Released prior to the announcement of the official election results, the organization's preliminary report noted the government's "efficient and professional" management of the election. Nevertheless, the report stated, "While election day was peaceful, significant irregularities were observed and important safeguards were often disregarded during voting, counting, and tabulation."

**Political Parties and Political Participation:** The law allows independent political parties. The Ministry of Justice has broad powers to oversee parties and may withhold financial and legal support to those it judges to be opposed to government policy. There were five registered political parties. The law makes it difficult for genuinely independent political parties to organize, nominate candidates, and campaign. The law allows the Ministry of Justice to suspend parties for as long as six months without a court order.

The government exercised control over established parties by controlling their financing and media exposure. By law election-related expenses are largely financed from the state budget. Private citizens and legal national entities may make monetary contributions ranging from 135 million soum (\$12,600) for private individuals to 1.35 billion soum (\$126,000) for legal entities. The law prohibits judges, public prosecutors, State Security Service officials, members of the armed forces, foreign citizens, and stateless persons from joining political parties. The law prohibits parties that are based on religion or ethnicity; oppose the sovereignty, integrity, or security of the country, or the constitutional rights and freedoms of its citizens; promote war or social, national, or religious hostility; or seek to overthrow the government. The law also prohibits the Islamist political organization Hizb ut-Tahrir, stating it promotes hatred and condones acts of terrorism. Independent party registration was suppressed and individuals not of an approved party who sought to run for the presidency were excluded.

International organizations, including OSCE short- and long-term monitors, were

present in the period prior to the election and on the day itself in 2021.

**Participation of Women and Members of Minority Groups:** No laws limit the participation of women and members of minority communities in the political process, and they did participate.

## **Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government**

The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials, but the government did not always implement the law effectively. There were numerous reports of government corruption.

The government continued development of a database of official corruption that includes the names of former corrupt government officials to prevent their reemployment with government. On August 8, President Mirziyoyev signed the Civil Service Law, establishing norms for government employees in civil service jobs. The law prohibits civil servants to accept gifts and engage in business activities, open accounts outside of the country, or acquire real estate abroad. They must also declare income and assets. The president, senators, members of parliament, judges and judicial, law enforcement and military personnel are exempt from the law. Authorities reported that for the first six months of the year, the conviction for corruption of 3,109 officials and the recovery of approximately 724 billion soum (\$64 million) in illicitly obtained funds in prior years.

**Corruption:** There were numerous reported abuses. On January 18, the senior departmental prosecutor of the Fergana Regional Prosecutor's Office abused his official power by promising a citizen the registration of 3.7 acres of land. Law enforcement officers arrested him while receiving a bribe for his services.

On September 7, the Fergana Criminal Court began a public hearing against a group of 44 Andijan officials, including former Mayor Bahromjon Khaidarov, former city prosecutor Gayrat Fozilov, and other regional officials on embezzlement, fraud, bribery, official negligence, and forgery charges. According to the preliminary conclusion of law enforcement officers, the defendants stole more than 63 billion soum (\$5.7 million).

On May 5, the Senate named the healthcare, education, and banking sectors as the country's most corrupt sectors.

## **Section 5. Governmental Posture Towards International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights**

Several domestic human rights groups operated in the country, although the government often hampered their ability to operate, investigate, and publish their findings on human rights cases. Government officials were somewhat cooperative and responsive to their views, but at times the government harassed and intimidated human rights and civil society activists.

International NGOs, including those that focus on human rights, continued to face obstacles in legally registering. The government did not allow unregistered international organizations to open bank accounts, unreasonably restricted the duration of validity of international NGO worker visas, and impeded efforts to overcome Supreme Court rulings banning certain international NGOs from registering and operating in the country.

**Retribution Against Human Rights Defenders (HRDs):** Harassment of activists continued to be a problem. Human rights activists and political opposition figures generally assumed that security agencies covertly monitored their telephone calls and activities.

There were numerous reported abuses. Margilan human rights activist and former political prisoner Ahmadjon Madmarov reported cases of pressure during the year. In December 2021 and January, local authorities pressured Madmarov and his son Habibullah not to cooperate with journalist and former political prisoner Umida Akhmedova, who was making a documentary about the rehabilitation of former prisoners. In April the regional secret services, through pressure on his sons, tried to stop Madmarov from traveling to Tashkent to meet with a foreign delegation regarding religious freedom. Madmarov also reported security officers pressuring him to retire from being an activist due to his advanced age.

Jahongir Otajonov, the pop singer who announced his presidential candidacy in

2021, reported that on March 14, four unknown assailants abducted him, took his cell phone, put a bag on his head, beat him, and tried to rape him. He also reported an asset freeze and a ban on his leaving the country and performing at any concerts, including at private events. In April Otajonov went public on TikTok with allegations of pressure and abuse at the hands of unknown assailants.

On April 19, police attempted to search the house of human rights activist Agzam Turgunov, but the search did not take place because Turgunov tried to photograph the search warrant, which turned out to be fake. The officers eventually left, apologizing for the “misunderstanding.” Turgunov also reported police were watching him closely and that a police car was often parked outside his house. In addition he received calls from the police for several months, asking about his plans for the day and offering to “accompany” him.

Activists reported harassment and pressure on individuals who participated in a March 1 meeting with the Ukrainian ambassador to the country in support of Ukraine. Anvar Nazirov, a civil activist who initiated the meeting, reported that in April authorities opened a fraud case against him on the grounds of underpayment of salary to his former assistant. According to Nazirov’s lawyer, the initiation of criminal rather than administrative proceedings is a violation of local law, as such violations constitute an administrative offense. According to the lawyer, the police illegally seized Nazirov’s cell phone and laptop without a warrant.

**The United Nations or Other International Bodies:** The Geneva-based UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances had not yet received a response to requests to visit the country dating back to 2011. In its 2019 annual report, the working group noted it still had seven outstanding cases from previous years. The working group reiterated its request to visit the country.

**Government Human Rights Bodies:** The goals of the Human Rights Ombudsman’s Office included promoting observance and public awareness of fundamental human rights, assisting in shaping legislation to comply with international human rights norms, and resolving cases of alleged abuse. The Ombudsman’s Office is tasked with mediation of disputes among citizens who contact it and makes recommendations to modify or uphold decisions of government agencies, but its recommendations are not binding. The

Ombudsman's Office can make unannounced inspections of prisons and had a separate division to investigate government abuse of businesses. According to human rights activists, the Ombudsman's Office is closely connected to high-ranking officials in the government, which limits its independence. Moreover, activists and prisoners have noted that the Ombudsman's Office often investigates torture allegations months after receiving the complaints, when there is no longer any evidence of torture, which leads to an underreporting of cases.

The National Human Rights Center is a government agency responsible for educating the public and officials on the principles of human rights and democracy and for government compliance with international obligations to provide human rights information.

## **Section 6. Discrimination and Societal Abuses**

### **Women**

**Rape and Domestic Violence:** The law defines rape as sexual intercourse committed by force, threats, or abuse of the helpless regardless of gender. Conviction of rape is punishable by three to 20 years' imprisonment. There is no separate legally recognized category of spousal rape. Domestic violence is listed as a crime against health or against sexual freedom. Activists reported the government did not effectively enforce either the law against rape or domestic violence. According to activists, victims of rape or sexual assault were not provided with victim support services and were subjected to repeated hostile interrogations by law enforcement officers. Due to this lack of support and broader societal pressures, victims of rape, sexual assault, and domestic violence were reluctant to report these crimes. By law mandatory reconciliation procedures may be imposed on survivors of domestic violence during divorce proceedings. The criminal and administrative codes do not include adequate provisions regarding punishment of convicted abusers. Protection orders may be issued, but activists stated they were of little use to the survivor, who often remained confined with the abuser. According to local media, 32,708 women received protection orders in the first eight months of the year, but few of these orders resulted in the successful prosecution and conviction of abusers. Of these, more than 27,000 cases of harassment and violence were committed in the family, more than 3,000

on the street, more than 1,000 in a public place, 81 in an educational institution, and 429 in the workplace.

The government provided no data on the incidence of gender-based violence. According to civil society activists calling for stiffer mandatory penalties for domestic violence, the problem remained acute. Following multiple social media videos depicting violence against women and children, on June 21, UNICEF expressed concerns regarding the seemingly commonplace nature of such incidents. Some incidents, including cases involving infants, occurred in public and in the presence of onlookers. Local experts pointed out the insufficiency of the criminal code in deterring rape and other sexual violence due to weak punishment for these crimes.

In 2021 a deputy dean of a university in Tashkent was arrested for attempted rape of a female university student. When she resisted and called for help, the deputy dean threw her out of a third-floor window. Saida Mirziyoyeva, the president's daughter, made a public appeal to end violence and sexual harassment of women in public institutions following the incident. On June 6, a Tashkent court found the deputy dean not guilty of rape and guilty of intentional infliction of serious harm to health. He was sentenced to three years' imprisonment at an open penal colony. He appealed his case on August 11.

On August 25, a Kuyichirchik man stabbed his wife, age 24, to death the day after a video circulated in the media of him beating her at a kindergarten in front of children.

In addition to spousal abuse, women were frequent victims of violence committed by in-laws, who often lived in the same house. On June 18, the Tashkent Regional Court sentenced a woman, age 67, to four years in prison for killing her daughter-in-law, age 37, a mother of three children, with a kitchen knife over domestic disputes. On October 1, a Fergana man, age 64, after a quarrel with his daughter-in-law, beat her unconscious and cut off her head.

Cultural norms discouraged women and their families from speaking openly regarding rape. Irina Matvienko, journalist and founder of *nemolchi.uz*, an independent project seeking to combat domestic violence in the country, stated that

the inaction of law enforcement authorities regarding domestic violence led to suicide and homicide among women, including incidents of women killing their children and then taking their own lives. On June 27, a native of Samarkand, age 29, committed suicide by drinking acid in her husband's house. The Samarkand woman was the second daughter-in-law in the family to commit suicide.

According to the Prosecutor General's Office, the first wife hanged herself in the same house in 2018. The Prosecutor General's Office filed a case of incitement to suicide against the victim's mother-in-law and husband.

There were government-run and some NGO-run shelters for survivors of domestic abuse and telephone hotlines for survivors seeking assistance. The government reported aiding more than 5,000 women at 135 social counseling centers.

Survivors of domestic violence were also at government Centers for Rehabilitation and Adaptation. According to the Ministry for the Support of Community and Family Affairs, the hotline received 50 to 60 calls per day on average. Authorities provided women in the shelters with food, medicine, and hygiene products and funds to cover other expenses.

**Sexual Harassment:** The law does not explicitly prohibit sexual harassment, but it is illegal for a male supervisor to coerce a woman having business or financial dependency into a sexual relationship. Social norms, lack of reporting, and lack of legal recourse made it difficult to assess the scope of the problem. Government efforts to enforce the law and prevent sexual harassment were unknown.

**Reproductive Rights:** There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities. Citizens had access to voluntary family planning, including the ability to choose methods of contraception. Women have the legal right to receive medical assistance for individual selection of contraceptive methods, based on their medical condition, age, and individual characteristics.

Contraception was not always available to men and women. Nevertheless, most districts had maternity clinics staffed by trained doctors who provided a wide range of prenatal and postpartum care. Menstrual health and hygiene products were available on the market but not accessible to all strata of the population, especially in poorer regions of the country. Poor sanitation and access to clean running water

in rural areas was a problem for menstrual hygiene, especially among school-age girls.

The government provided access to sexual and reproductive health services, including emergency contraception for women who reported sexual violence; however, activists reported the topic remained taboo, and there were no official statistics on the number of cases.

**Discrimination:** The law provides for the same legal status and rights for women as for men in the areas of health care, education, science, culture, labor, and social protection.

By law women may own property, inherit goods, secure employment outside the home, obtain credit, and own and manage a business. Traditional views on the role of women contributed to increased social difficulties for women pursuing their legal rights in these areas. In some regions, due to religious and cultural views, husbands do not allow their wives to work.

## **Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination**

There are no legal impediments for citizens who belong to one of the country's ethnic minorities. By law all citizens have equal rights without regard to their ethnicity.

Complaints of societal violence or discrimination against members of ethnic minority groups were rare. The law does not require Uzbek language ability to obtain citizenship, but language often was a sensitive matter. Uzbek is the state language, and the constitution requires that the president speak it to conduct official business. The law also states Russian is "the language of interethnic communication." There are criminal penalties for creating discord through inflammatory statements against other ethnic groups.

Officials reportedly reserved senior positions in the government bureaucracy and business for ethnic Uzbeks, although there were numerous exceptions.

There were no government programs to mitigate societal, racial, or ethnic biases.



## Children

**Birth Registration:** Citizenship is derived by birth within the country's territory or from one's parents. The government generally registered all births immediately without discrimination.

**Child Abuse:** Legal protections against child abuse exist. Society generally considered child abuse to be an internal family matter. Little official information was available on the subject, including on the government's efforts to combat it.

Human rights activists reported that patterns of child abuse existed and that law enforcement agencies often did not act on reports of violence and child abuse. In 2021 the prosecutor's office of the Surkhandaryo Region reported that the Termez city prosecutor reversed the decision of the Termez Department of Internal Affairs to not conduct a criminal investigation into the repeated rape of a schoolgirl, age 16, during a 14-month period and returned the case for further investigation. In 2021 the Criminal Investigation Department of the Termez Internal Affairs Department opened a criminal case (rape of a person whom the perpetrator knows to be younger than age 18) which is punishable by 10 to 15 years' imprisonment. The case continued at year's end, but the government reported it had not followed up on the case due to lack of information regarding the victim.

**Child, Early, and Forced Marriage:** The minimum legal age for marriage is 18 for both sexes. District authorities may lower the age by one year in exceptional cases. In some rural areas, girls age 15 or younger married men in religious ceremonies not officially recognized by the state.

**Sexual Exploitation of Children:** The law seeks to protect children from "all forms of exploitation," including the sale, grooming, offering, or procuring of children for commercial sexual exploitation, and practices related to child pornography. Authorities effectively enforced the law.

Sexual exploitation of minors was a problem. The country was a source of sex trafficking victims and destination for sex tourism. Websites advertised the country as a sex tourism destination. Minors were exploited internally in brothels, clubs, and private residences and were trafficked abroad to the Middle East, Eurasia, and Southeast Asia.

The minimum age for consensual sex is 16. Involving a child in commercial sexual exploitation is punishable by a monetary fine and imprisonment of up to five years. The punishment for statutory rape is 15 to 20 years' imprisonment. Production, exhibition, or distribution of child pornography is punishable by a monetary fine or by three to five years' imprisonment.

**Institutionalized Children:** According to UNICEF, more than 20,000 children with disabilities resided in institutions. Children placed in residential care for educational purposes were overrepresented in these institutions. The most recent reports from the State Statistics Agency, published in 2017, indicated that 84 percent of all children placed in residential care were children with disabilities, with children between ages seven and 17 representing the largest group.

## **Antisemitism**

Observers estimated the Jewish population at fewer than 10,000, concentrated mostly in Tashkent, Samarkand, the Fergana Valley, and Bukhara. Their numbers continued to decline due to emigration, largely for economic reasons. There were no reports of antisemitic acts or patterns of discrimination against Jews.

## **Trafficking in Persons**

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

## **Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity or Expression, or Sex Characteristics**

**Criminalization:** The law criminalizes consensual same-sex sexual conduct between men. Conviction is punishable by up to three years' imprisonment. The law does not criminalize consensual same-sex sexual conduct between women.

Authorities enforced the law. Human rights defenders reported at least five cases of persons who faced prosecution in 2021. They speculated this could be due to information sharing between the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Justice that was ostensibly intended to enable the Ministry of Justice to monitor HIV-positive

individuals to prevent the spread of disease. Human rights defenders believed authorities used this information to identify, charge, and prosecute gay HIV-positive men.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs reported that 13 men convicted of performing same-sex sexual acts were serving prison sentences and being subjected to “conversion therapy” or psychological treatment of the “disorder of homosexuality” to “eliminate repeat crimes and offenses.”

HRW reported a case in which physicians subjected two men to forced anal exams, which served as evidence in their conviction; the men were serving two-year prison sentences at year’s end.

On June 7, international human rights groups renewed calls for authorities to decriminalize homosexuality, saying it was imperative for the country to make progress toward honoring its international human rights commitments. Human rights defenders continued to claim security services used informants to entrap and blackmail men suspected of being gay. They alleged security services routinely told arrested LGBTQI+ persons they would serve prison time if they did not agree to serve as informants on other LGBTQI+ persons.

On February 22, Tashkent City Court denied an appeal of a transgender person sentenced in December 2021 to five years of “restricted movement,” meaning the individual has an evening curfew and cannot be out after dark nor travel outside of Tashkent without prior police permission.

**Violence against LGBTQI+ Persons:** According to human rights NGOs, authorities conducted compulsory rectal exams on persons suspected of same-sex sexual conduct. The Eurasian Coalition on Health, Rights, Gender and Sexual Diversity and the International Partnership for Human Rights documented at least four cases between 2017 and 2020 in which men were subjected to forced anal exams. In 2021 international rights groups urged the president to immediately order officials to abandon such evidentiary procedures.

In 2021 a group of approximately 100 men violently protested in Tashkent against LGBTQI+ persons, yelling “Allah (God) is the greatest,” beating random pedestrians, and damaging cars. The group gathered in reaction to online posts by

pro-LGBTQI+ blogger Miraziz Bazarov. Unknown assailants later severely beat Bazarov, who was hospitalized for one month. Police detained approximately 70 persons, 31 of whom were charged with hooliganism and various other offenses but not for assault. Human rights activists reported that in the wake of the attack, members of the LGBTQI+ community in Tashkent were being harassed by both local authorities and private citizens and were on “red alert,” and were seeking to avoid going out in public.

Regarding the violent protest, the then chair of the Public Fund for the Support and Development of Mass Media, Komil Allomjonov, (now the deputy head of the Presidential Administration) chastised foreign organizations promoting LGBTQI+ rights, saying “Before making any demands to Uzbekistan or any other country, foreign organizations must take into account the mentality, religion, culture, and traditions of the nation. In our country, where the majority are Muslims, society does not accept gay men and women.” Allomjonov stated the government could do little to protect LGBTQI+ individuals because, “Even if laws against gay persons are relaxed, society will not accept it.”

**Discrimination:** The law does not prohibit discrimination against LGBTQI+ persons in housing, employment, nationality laws, and access to government services, such as health care.

The Ministry of Health reportedly considered compulsory HIV testing of men who have sex with men as a response to rising HIV rates.

**Availability of Legal Gender Recognition:** The law provides a pathway for someone to legally change his or her gender. Activists report having been able to successfully undergo gender reassignment surgery and change their gender on their national identity documents.

**Involuntary or Coercive Medical or Psychological Practices Specifically Targeting LGBTQI+ Individuals:** According to the government, inmates convicted of same-sex sexual conduct between men must undergo psychological counseling in order to “keep them from similar repeat offenses.”

Imams in their sermons, as well as Islamic bloggers, said that being LGBTQI+ is contrary to Islam and that society must oppose any manifestation of LGBTQI+.

**Restrictions of Freedom of Expression, Association, or Peaceful Assembly:**

Deeply negative social attitudes related to sexual orientation and gender identity limited the freedom of expression of the LGBTQI+ community and led to discrimination. Society generally considered same-sex sexual conduct a taboo subject. There were no known LGBTQI+ organizations.

In November a man dressed as a woman was filmed being chased and beaten by a group of private citizens. The victim was arrested and charged with hooliganism, and the man who filmed the crime was arrested for “disclosure of information that could cause moral or material damage to a citizen.”

**Persons with Disabilities**

Persons with disabilities do not have access to education, health services, public buildings, and transportation on an equal basis with others. No information was available concerning enforcement, the imposition of monetary fines, or regarding patterns of abuse in educational and mental health facilities. Approximately 75 percent of persons with disabilities lived below the poverty line. Societal discrimination was a problem. According to the government, 6,321 persons with disabilities were enrolled in higher education in the 2021-22 educational year, and 6,462 children with disabilities studied at 74 state specialized preschools.

There were no reports of violence, intimidation, or abuse of persons with disabilities, but the Soviet legacy of discrimination continued, including segregating persons with disabilities from public view. In May authorities, in cooperation with UN agencies, launched a joint action plan to implement provisions of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Visually impaired students had access to dated braille books published during Soviet times and specialized computers.

The government mandates that urban and residential areas, airports, railway stations, and other facilities must provide for access to persons with disabilities, although there were no specific government programs implemented and activists reported difficulties with access. The law provides for monetary fines if buildings, including private shops and restaurants, are not accessible. Disability rights activists reported accessibility remained inadequate, noting, for example, that

many of the high schools constructed in prior years had exterior ramps but no interior modifications to facilitate access by wheelchair users.

The government reserved approximately 9,000 employment positions for adults with disabilities, but only 896 adult persons with disabilities were employed in one of the designated positions. The law obliges public institutions and private enterprises, where at least 20 individuals are employed, to reserve at least 3 percent of jobs for persons with disabilities. Activists reported this law was rarely implemented or enforced. Activists noted the amounts of disability benefits and pensions were inadequate to the needs of socially vulnerable families due to the lack of an officially established minimum subsistence level.

## **Other Societal Violence or Discrimination**

The law prohibits discrimination against those infected with HIV and provides for free health care. Persons known to be HIV-positive reported social isolation and discrimination by public agency workers, health personnel, law enforcement officers, landlords, and employers after their HIV status became known. The military summarily expelled recruits in the armed services found to be HIV-positive. Some LGBTQI+ community activists reported that hospital wards reviewed the personal history of HIV-positive patients and summarily categorized them as drug addicts, homosexuals, or engaged in commercial sexual exploitation. Hospital officials reportedly sometimes marked some HIV-positive patients' files as "homosexual" and referred them to police for investigation, because consensual same-sex sexual conduct between men is a criminal act in the country.

Due to an information-sharing agreement between the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of the Interior, the privacy of HIV-positive persons was not respected. Activists and media reported gay, HIV-positive men being tricked by workers at HIV testing centers into revealing their sexual orientation. This information was then given to the Ministry of the Interior under the auspices of preventing the further spread of HIV and AIDS. Ministry of Interior officials reportedly then visited these men and coerced them into revealing their sexual partners. The unwilling informants and their sexual partners were then charged with same-sex sexual contact between men and spreading sexually transmitted diseases or HIV.

## **Section 7. Worker Rights**

### **a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining**

The law allows workers to form and join independent unions and bargain collectively, but no independent labor unions operated in the country. The state-controlled Federation of Trade Unions of Uzbekistan (FTUU) was the only operating labor union of any kind in the country.

The law neither provides for nor prohibits the right to strike, but it prohibits antiunion discrimination. The law on trade unions states that workers may not be fired due to trade union membership, but it does not clearly state whether workers fired for union activity must be reinstated. Volunteers in public works and workers employed by individuals without documented contracts do not have strong legal protections of their rights.

Despite the adoption of a law on trade unions in 2019, which prohibits the interference of government bodies in the trade union activities, the state still retains significant control. Local critics noted that the protection of workers' rights and interests in organizations and the freedom to elect union leaders had been withheld.

The law provides penalties for violating freedom of association laws. Penalties were not commensurate with those for other laws involving denials of civil rights, such as discrimination and were rarely applied against violators. FTUU unions remained centralized, controlled by, and dependent on the government. Regional and industrial trade unions remained managed by the state. Workers believed that attempts to create independent alternative unions would be repressed. In 2021 local authorities reportedly harassed and threatened several activists in response to their efforts to establish the country's first independent labor union. Some civil society experts noted a lack of freedom of association for independent monitoring and reporting of labor rights violations.

There were reports that local government officials cooperated with management at Indorama Agro, one of the country's largest cotton farms, to interfere in the leadership election for the company's union, which affiliated with the FTUU in 2021 following pressure from the government to do so. The workers appealed to

regional and national FTUU bodies, which overturned the contested union leadership election at Indorama and supported holding a new election.

## **b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor**

The law prohibits all forms of forced or compulsory labor, except as legal punishment for conviction of such offenses as robbery, fraud, or tax evasion or as specified by law. Certain sections of the criminal code allow for compulsory labor as a punishment for conviction of offenses, including defamation and incitement of national, racial, ethnic, or religious enmity. Forced labor for public works continued. Some local officials forced teachers, students (including children), private businesses employees, and others to work in construction and agriculture and to clean parks, streets, and buildings. Officials occasionally cast these compulsory tasks as part of the country's traditional *hashar* system, under which community members are expected to perform voluntary work for communal benefit.

With the elimination of government-mandated cotton production quotas, local officials are no longer officially responsible for mobilizing sufficient labor to meet established production targets in the harvest, which in previous years had been a key driver of forced labor. The government continued to take steps towards privatizing the cotton sector by expanding cotton "clusters." Cotton clusters are private or state-owned, vertically integrated enterprises (from farm to finished product) that receive land concessions from the government to either farm cotton directly or contract with cotton farmers in each district. Human rights activists asserted that local government officials directly or indirectly owned most clusters despite notional privatization.

Civil society experts noted continuous involvement of government officials in the organization of the harvest could lead to the use of coercion due to the disparate power balance from a reliance on mahallas to recruit pickers and a lack of independent recruitment systems. Civil society experts reported clusters did not typically face any penalties from local officials when they violated contract obligations with farmers, such as delay of payments for cotton delivered. Khokims reportedly forced farmers to sign contracts with the clusters in their districts. Media and civil society reports indicated that continuing development of the



privatized cluster system inadvertently generated other vulnerabilities, including avenues for private businesses to subject harvest workers to contract violations, loss of bargaining power or choice of cluster-affiliation, coerced cultivation of cotton under threat of land loss, wage irregularities, and forced overtime.

Responsibility for overseeing government efforts to end forced labor and trafficking in persons resides with the National Commission on Trafficking in Persons and Forced Labor. The commission is divided into subcommittees for trafficking in persons, chaired by the minister of internal affairs, and for forced labor, chaired by the minister of employment and labor relations. Both act as deputy chairs to the commission itself. Tanzila Narbaeva, who also served as chair of the Senate, continued to fulfill the role of special rapporteur for the commission. The government-empowered special rapporteur reports directly to the president. Regional-level bodies report to the commission on implementation of laws and regulations related to forced labor and trafficking in persons. Inspectors from the Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations have authority to enforce laws on forced labor. The lead for matters related to forced labor or trafficking in persons is the special rapporteur of the National Commission on Trafficking in Persons and Forced Labor. Representatives from the International Labor Organization (ILO) and civil society reported only a few instances of forced labor occurred in the 2021 annual cotton harvest. The 2021 ILO *Third-Party Monitoring Report of the Cotton Harvest in Uzbekistan* found that the country had eradicated systemic forced and child labor during the 2021 cotton harvest.

The government maintained formal prohibitions on the use of forced labor in all economic sectors and worked to enforce these provisions. The government enforced the law, but penalties were not commensurate with those for conviction of other analogous serious crimes, such as kidnapping. Administrative penalties against the use of forced labor include a monetary fine for first offense. Secondary offenses are criminalized. The Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations reported five cases of forced labor were under investigation at year's end. The ministry also reported convicting 154 defendants for crimes involving trafficking in 2021; the government sentenced 94 defendants. Additionally, the government made efforts to meet with international organizations, NGOs, civil society organizations, and local activists to discuss the problem of forced labor publicly

and to receive feedback, including suggestions and criticism to enable it to improve its approach to forced labor in the cotton harvest. The government acknowledged its problem with forced labor and sought assistance to eliminate it.

Despite the prohibition against forced labor, NGO accounts of forced labor in the silk cocoon harvest alleged direct local government involvement and that some silk cocoon clusters forced farmers to sign compulsory contracts, requiring them to provide a specific amount of silk cocoons for every 2.5 acres (hectare) of land. Farmers who failed to produce the required quota risked the expropriation of their land by the local government.

Men were most likely to be exploited abroad as migrant laborers, and women were most likely to be forced to labor in country. Instances of child labor exploitation continued to be reported. The government increased its efforts to combat all forms of forced labor by informing the public of the prohibition against forced labor, including in the annual cotton harvest. Harvesters typically came from groups such as impoverished families, unemployed persons, and housewives.

Also see the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

### **c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment**

See the Department of Labor's *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings/>.

### **d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation**

Laws and regulations prohibit discrimination with respect to employment and occupation based on race, gender, religion, and language. The labor code states that differences in the treatment of individuals deserving of the state's protection or requiring special accommodation, including women, children, and persons with disabilities, are not considered discriminatory. The law does not prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity, age, political opinion, national origin or citizenship, or social origin. HIV-positive individuals are legally prohibited from being employed in certain occupations, including those in the medical field that require direct contact with patients or with blood or blood

products as well as in cosmetology or haircutting. There was insufficient publicly available data to determine whether the Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations enforced these laws and regulations, and no data were available on instances of government actions to deal with cases of illegal discrimination. Penalties were commensurate to laws related to civil rights, such as election interference.

The labor code prohibits refusing employment based on an applicant's criminal record or the criminal record of a close relative. The labor code and other civil labor law provisions do not explicitly prohibit or establish penalties for sexual harassment in the workplace.

### **e. Acceptable Conditions of Work**

**Wage and Hour Laws:** The law provides for a national minimum wage, which was roughly double Uzbekistan's official minimum consumption expenditure. The law establishes a standard workweek of 40 hours and requires a 24-hour rest period. The law provides for paid annual holidays. The law provides overtime compensation as specified in employment contracts or as agreed with an employee's trade union. Such compensation may be provided in the form of additional pay or leave. The law states that overtime compensation should not be less than 200 percent of the employee's average monthly salary rate. Additional leave time should not be less than the length of actual overtime work. An employee may not work more than 120 hours of overtime per year, but this limitation was not generally observed, particularly in the public sector. The law prohibits compulsory overtime. The government effectively enforced these laws in the formal economy. Penalties for violations of wage and overtime laws were not commensurate with those for similar crimes, such as fraud. No data was available on enforcement of these laws in the informal economy.

**Occupational Safety and Health:** The Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations establishes and enforces occupational safety and health (OSH) standards in consultation with unions. According to the law, health and safety standards should be applied in all sectors. State Labor Inspectors regularly conducted workplace safety inspections and actively identified OSH violations. State Labor Inspectors can levy administrative penalties in the form of fines. The government

maintains a hotline to respond to citizen complaints about labor violations.

The law provides that workers may legally remove themselves from hazardous work if an employer fails to provide adequate safety measures for the job, and the employer must pay the employee during the time of the work stoppage or provide severance pay if the employee chooses to terminate employment. The law requires employers to protect against civil liability for damage caused to the life or health of an employee in connection with a work injury, occupational disease, or other injury to health caused by the employee's performance on the job. In addition, a company's employees have the right to demand, and the administration is obliged to provide them with, information on the state of working conditions and safety at work, available personal protection means, benefits, and compensations.

**Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement:** The government effectively enforced wage, hour and OSH laws in the formal economy. No data were available on enforcement of these laws in the informal economy. Penalties for violations of OSH laws were administrative in nature; state labor inspectors can levy only administrative penalties (such as fines). The Ministry of Employment and Labor Relations maintains protocols requiring investigation into labor complaints within five business days. The ministry or a local governor's office could initiate a selective inspection of a business, and special inspections were conducted in response to accidents or complaints. Inspectors have the authority to make unannounced inspections and initiate sanctions.

In 2021 the government's labor inspectorate reported conducting 27,471 inspections in 2021 in all sectors of the economy, not counting those for farmers and clusters, (compared with 19,226 in 2020). The inspectorate collected 24 billion soum (\$2.22 million) in fines, compared to 11.6 billion soum (\$1.07 million) in 2020, and contributed the amount to the Community Works Fund. As in previous years, the inspectorate did not report screening for trafficking indicators. Labor inspectors were not empowered to bring criminal charges for first-time violations of the law against forced labor, and international observers noted some inspectors also demonstrated limited comfort with their administrative enforcement mandate.

The most common violations committed by private-sector employers were

violations of wage, overtime, and OSH standards. Although regulations provide standards for workplace safety, workers reportedly worked without necessary protective clothing and equipment at some hazardous job sites.

**Informal Sector:** In April the International Monetary Fund estimated the informal sector employed approximately 40 percent of the workforce and produced one-third of GDP. The government worked to shift more of the economy from informal to the formal economy and to provide labor and social protections to those working informally. Many employees had official part-time or low-income jobs, and many continued to work informally, especially in the cotton, silk, construction, and catering sectors. Labor protections were rarely extended to workers in the informal labor sector.